



THE Simpson PRIZE

A COMPETITION FOR
YEAR 9 AND 10 STUDENTS

2010 Winner
Western Australia

Dale Atkinson
Wesley College



Australian War Correspondents

Dale Atkinson
Wesley College



The Anzac legend is believed to have been first coined by war correspondent Charles Bean, Anzac stood, and still stands, for reckless valour in a good cause, for enterprise, resourcefulness, fidelity, comradeship, and endurance that will never own defeat.¹

Since its birthplace at Gallipoli in 1915, this spirit of mateship and courageousness has been embedded in this nation and is a source of immense pride by all its citizens. Unfortunately, the Anzac story is not complete; one group has yet to have its story fully told. In order to keep the public knowledgeable about Australia's progress during the war, several war correspondents² including, Keith Murdoch, Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett and Charles Bean, reported from the front. Their inspiring reports assisted in informing the public about the valiant efforts of the diggers developing a sense of public pride and thus creating the Anzac legend. Today Anzac Day is one of the most commemorated events in Australia. However, despite the correspondent's extraordinary achievements in creating this spirit, the actual tale of those who told the stories of others has remained unheard.

It is unknown to many that media giant, Keith Murdoch was a war correspondent in WWI. Upon the wars outbreak, Murdoch applied to be Australia's official correspondent, narrowly losing to Charles Bean. In 1915, Murdoch transferred to London and began reporting on the war, visiting Gallipoli in August. Spending only four days on the beaches, Murdoch posted several moving reports that whilst very negative towards the conflict were full of praise for the Anzac's outstanding efforts. He also met with the Commonwealth correspondent, Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, who was appalled by the horrific nature of the campaign and the undemocratic censorship that he had endured. Bartlett persuaded Murdoch to pass on a letter to Prime Minister Asquith which conveyed his discontent. Unfortunately, the letter was confiscated³. Instead, Murdoch wrote to Australian Prime Minister Fisher himself addressing many of Ashmead-Bartlett's issues⁴ which,

lavishly and sentimentally praised the Australians and attacked the performance of the British army.⁵

1 Richard Nile, *The Australian Legend and all its discontents*, Pg 27

2 *The Correspondents*, National Library of Australia, http://www.nla.gov.au/gallipolidespatches/2-the_correspon.html

3 Reproduction of Ashmead-Bartlett's letter *FirstWorldWar.com*, http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/ashmeadbartlett_letter.htm

4 National Library of Australia, Gallipoli letter from Keith Arthur Murdoch to Andrew Fisher, 1915 [manuscript], 4551680

5 Murdoch, Sir Keith (1885-1952), *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, <http://adbonline.anu.edu.au/biogs/A100610b.htm>

It is widely accepted that Murdoch's letter provided ammunition for the evacuation of Gallipoli. While best known for his achievements as the media giant he became, Sir Keith Murdoch played an enormous role as a correspondent, creating huge feelings of respect towards the courageous and stoic Anzacs. Apart from developing this legend, he also adopted it. By risking his own reputation during the war, Murdoch's act of selflessness demonstrated the quintessential act of the Anzac resulting in the withdrawal from Gallipoli, undoubtedly saving many men's lives.

Despite being British, Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett was one of the most integral people in the creation of the Anzac legend. Although Bean was Australia's official correspondent, due to censorship requirements, often Bartlett's reports would reach Australia first. The first despatch from Gallipoli to reach Australia was by Bartlett arriving six days before Bean's. It was extremely empathetic towards the actions of the Australian men. As an experienced war correspondent, this was accepted with the greatest authority.

The tradition of the Anzac landing is probably more influenced by that first story [Bartlett's] than by all the other accounts that have since been written.⁶

Ashmead-Bartlett viewed the Dardanelles expedition negatively. He was increasingly hostile towards its commander, General Hamilton⁷ but was unable to report his distaste due to strict censorship. In the hope of getting a message through, he asked Murdoch to carry a letter to the British Prime Minister. Although, his original letter never reached England, Ashmead-Bartlett was immediately expelled from Gallipoli. Returning to London, he wrote, unrestricted, on his dissatisfaction towards the campaign and was directly involved in its evacuation. He continued to highly praise the Anzacs for their valorous attitude and performance, assisting in not only creating respect and empathy within Australia but throughout the Commonwealth. These reports helped forge Australia's identity as a daring and valiant country. Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett has been heralded as one of the pinnacle figures in developing the Anzac tradition. According to his colleague Charles Patrick Smith,

Mr Ashmead-Bartlett has done almost as much towards bringing Australian's into the limelight of the world-fame as have the heroic deeds of our soldiers themselves.⁸

When the war broke out, *The Sydney Morning Herald's* editor Charles Bean was elected to become Australia's official war correspondent. Bean landed in Gallipoli in April 1915, just over five hours after the initial attack and despite being wounded in the leg remained there for the entire eight month campaign. Bean's reports were known for their copious amounts of detail which often caused much difficulty with censors,⁹ resulting in many of Bean's reports arriving in Australia after those of Ashmead-Bartlett's. Often writing about the experiences of the average front line soldier, Bean's reporting style was a blend of devastating truth and cheerful anecdote demonstrating the legendary stoicism and intrepidity of the Anzacs. These writings have been directly linked to the legends creation according to historian Jonathon King,

Bean was the founder of the Anzac legend because his writing was so good.¹⁰

After Gallipoli, Bean reported from the Western Front. He felt that those who fought and died for their country should be remembered and dedicated much of his post war life to creating the National War Memorial in Canberra.¹¹ Bean has been widely regarded as one of Australia's greatest historians, his efforts as a preservationist resulting in Australia's war collection being one of the world's largest and

6 Dudley Mcarthy, Gallipoli to the Somme, the story of C.E.W. Bean, Pg 128

7 Sir Ian Hamilton, FirstWorldWar.com, <http://www.firstworldwar.com/bio/hamilton.htm>

8 Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, National Library of Australia, <http://www.nla.gov.au/gallipolidespatches/2-2-3-ashmead.html>

9 Censorship, <http://www.nla.gov.au/gallipolidespatches/3-censorship.html>

10 Op Cit. The Age, <http://www.theage.com.au/flash/anzaco5/bean/bean.htm>

11 Australian War Memorial About, Australian War Memorial, <http://www.awm.gov.au/about/>

best documented. However, despite these efforts to commemorate the Anzacs, he is rarely credited for his actions in founding the legend itself.

While we may not know much about Bean we certainly know a lot about his legacy, the Anzac legend.¹²

His writings as a correspondent have undoubtedly assisted in the creation and commemoration of the astounding efforts of the Anzacs over ninety years ago.

Australia's national identity was forged on the beaches of Gallipoli by the outstanding deeds of the diggers but their actions would not be remembered with such passion without the efforts of Australia's war correspondents who tirelessly worked to inform the public of the gallant efforts of the Anzacs. Keith Murdoch, Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett and Charles Bean all contributed hugely, their reports allowing those back home and throughout the world to remain aware of Australia's courageous actions. The Anzac reputation put on display by these correspondents, portrayed Australia not as a small, defenceless nation but as a mighty and reckonable force. Their endeavours began a distinct sense of national pride known as the Anzac spirit. This spirit, as coined by those correspondents, has over the last ninety years grown to become a foundation of Australian culture and society. However, despite these journalists endearing efforts to recognise the diggers, they themselves have been forgotten. Today, much is known about the inspiring achievements of the Australian troops but few know of the audacious feats of those who first told their stories.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Author Unknown, 11/11/2002, 'Charles Edwin Woodrow (CEW) Bean, Australia's WW1 historian,' *Digger History Info*, Unknown location, <http://www.diggerhistory.info/pages-heroes/bean.htm>
- Author Unknown, 2009, 'Origins of the Australian War Memorial Charles Bean,' Australian War Memorial, Canberra ACT, <http://www.awm.gov.au/about/bean.asp>
- John Hurst, 1998, 'Smith, Charles Patrick (1877–1963),' *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 11, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne Victoria, Pg 640–641.
- Collective Authors, 10/11/2009, 'Keith Murdoch,' *Wikipedia*, Unknown location, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keith_Murdoch
- Geoffrey Serle, 1986, 'Murdoch, Sir Keith Arthur (1885–1952),' *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 10, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne Victoria, Pg 622–627.
- Author Unknown, 2009, 'Sir Keith Murdoch,' National Library of Australia, Canberra ACT, <http://www.nla.gov.au/gallipolidespatches/2-2-1-murdoch.html>
- Author Unknown, 2009, 'Phillip Schuler and Charles Patrick Smith,' National Library of Australia, Canberra ACT, http://www.nla.gov.au/gallipolidespatches/2-3-1-smith_schuler.html
- Author Unknown, 2009, 'The Correspondents,' National Library of Australia, Canberra ACT http://www.nla.gov.au/gallipolidespatches/2-the_correspon.html
- Author Unknown, 2009, 'Charles Edward Bean Smith,' National Library of Australia, <http://www.nla.gov.au/gallipolidespatches/2-1-1-bean.html>
- Author Unknown, 2009, 'Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett,' National Library of Australia, <http://www.nla.gov.au/gallipolidespatches/2-2-3-ashmead.html>
- Author Unknown, 2005, 'Charles Bean (1879–1968),' *The Age*, <http://www.theage.com.au/flash/anzaco5/bean/bean.htm>
- Dr Peter Stanley, 12/4/2002, 'The Anzac Spirit,' Australian War Memorial, <http://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/anzac/spirit.asp>

¹² Charles Bean (1879–1968), *The Age*, <http://www.theage.com.au/flash/anzaco5/bean/bean.htm>

-
- David W. Cameron, 2007, *25 April 1915 The day the Anzac legend was born*, Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest NSW
- Kevin Fewster, 1983, *Beans Gallipoli: The diary of Australia's official war correspondent*, Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest NSW
- Michael Duffy, 22/8/2009, 'Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett's letter to Prime Minister Asquith,' 8 September 1915, FirstWorldWar.com, http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/ashmeadbartlett_letter.htm, Unknown location
- Michael Duffy, 22/8/2009, 'Sir Ian Hamilton,' FirstWorldWar.com, <http://www.firstworldwar.com/bio/hamilton.htm>, Unknown location
- Author Unknown, 2009, 'Ellis Asmead-Bartlett,' National Library of Australia, Canberra ACT, <http://www.nla.gov.au/gallipolidespatches/2-2-3-ashmead.html>
- Author Unknown, 2009, 'About the Australian War Memorial,' Australian War Memorial, Canberra ACT, <http://www.awm.gov.au/about/>
- Author Unknown, 2009, 'Censorship,' National Library of Australia, Canberra ACT, <http://www.nla.gov.au/gallipolidespatches/3-censorship.html>
- Sir Keith Andrew Murdoch, 1915, 'Gallipoli letter from Keith Arthur Murdoch to Andrew Fisher, 1915 [manuscript],' National Library of Australia, Canberra ACT, http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/4551680?lookfor=pi:nla.ms*&offset=189&max=1129

